

“Love one another as I have loved you!”

Scripture Reading: John 13:31-35; 15:9-12

Introduction

- 1) What is at the very heart of our Christian faith? What message did Jesus communicate to His disciples?
 - a) During the days and weeks immediately before Jesus was taken to be crucified, Jesus sat down with His Eleven and shared His heart with them.
 - b) As He looked around the Upper Room looking intently and with deep love for each of His beloved followers (John 13:1), He called them to “love one another”. “LOVE” is without one very clear note in Jesus’ last message and teaching to His intimate group of followers. See John 13:34,35.
- 2) Why was this topic so heavy on Jesus’ heart at that time?
 - a) Because Jesus knew the works and ways of the evil one to bring down His work – by setting these brothers against one another – though Jesus Himself would be protecting them through His prayers behind the scenes – see Luke 22:31-32.
 - b) Because Jesus realised that their love for one another would be the “cement” for holding His holy “temple” together as it grew among the nations. His calling to them included:
 - i) Preaching that Jesus Christ Himself was the rock-solid FOUNDATION for His temple – see 1 Cor.3:11;
 - ii) Teaching that God’s people were the “LIVING STONES” of God’s new temple – see 1 Peter 2:4 (“living stones”); and
 - iii) Relating to one another with a genuine and enduring love for one another – like the CEMENT that would keep these stones of His temple together.
- 3) There are few subjects and messages that we God’s people need to hear more about today than this very topic: “Love one another as I have loved you!”

A. HEARING JESUS’ COMMAND

- 1) Take note of the SIMPLICITY of Jesus’ command – though it is not easy to practise: “Love one another as I have loved you!” See John 13:34; 15:12,17. Jesus has given to us not many different commands to be followed or laws to be kept but essentially ONE. It is the bottom-line or base line of all human relationships – which makes living in relationship with others especially those within the body of Christ much simpler though at the same far more challenging – all we need to remember is that we are called to love one another – a call to us at all times to get back to basics – keeps us from having to keep track with how we are doing keeping many rules and laws. It is a truly profound truth – simple yet at the same time deeper than the deepest sea.

- 2) Take note of the STRENGTH of Jesus' command, how He emphasises it – how He repeats it more than once in the same message. See John 13:34,35; 14:21,23; 15:9ff.
- 3) Take note of His “LOVE”, not a sentimental and human love but the divine “agape” love just as He had loved them. What demonstrations of love had His early disciples witnessed in the life of Jesus? How would HIS love have touched their lives in everyday situations?
 - a) He loved them by protecting them from the evil one especially directed at them through threats and intentions of the Jewish leaders – just as a shepherd loves and guards his sheep against the threat of wild animals. See John 10:11-14; 17:12 *“While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.”*
 - b) He loved them by not keeping a record of their sins and being harsh and unforgiving towards them when they got caught up in their own fleshly desires for greatness in God’s coming kingdom. See Mark 9:30-35; cf. Ps.130:3-4.
 - c) He loved them by correcting and rebuking for their unbelief as a loving parent corrects and rebukes their children in love – no matter how hard it may be. See Proverbs 3:11-12.
 - d) He loved them by warning them of the dangers ahead – how Satan was planning to tempt them and cause them to fall. See Luke 22:31-32.
 - e) He loved them by sacrificing His very life’s blood in their place – when they were totally unworthy of such love. See Rom.5:8.
- 4) Take note of THE PEOPLE whom Jesus commanded His followers to love – “love ONE ANOTHER”.
 - a) The very ones closest to them – that they had been living with day after day – the ones who were very different – and probably difficult to love – like those who wanted to sit at Jesus’ right and left in His kingdom. See Mark 10:35-40.
 - b) The men and the women – remember how many of those around Jesus were women, not just the Twelve – and remember also that Jesus gave this command in a society and at a time when to be a woman meant you were a “second-class” citizen in a strongly male-dominated society.
 - c) The lovely and the unlovely, the high and the low, the respected and the outcasts – note that some of Jesus’ followers had belonged to the despised classes (called “sinners”), like tax collectors, former prostitutes, leprosy sufferers – in an age when normal people treated such people as “rejects” in society, as “outcasts” – regarding them as hardly human. Jesus had loved each one of these – and treated them as His own “family” (Matt.12:48-50 *“He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”* He Himself had shown such great love.
- 5) Transition: The same Lord Jesus continues – even today – to keep reminding His people that this is His commandment and will, as well as His prayer, that we love one another from the heart – just as He has loved us. So it isn’t enough just to listen to this command and agree that it is in the Bible. We are called to obey and HEED it.

B. HEEDING JESUS' COMMAND

- 1) How do we respond? If we know anything from experience, we will respond by saying: "But Lord, this is IMPOSSIBLE! We aren't able to obey Your command – even though we might want to."
 - a) Yes, it is true that we cannot obey Jesus' command.
 - b) But the impossible can become possible when we understand that God Himself has come to live within us so that we can do the impossible through His power (i.e. the Person of His Spirit).
 - c) For that very purpose God gave His Spirit to His early disciples – and to us – so that through us He can do the impossible: to love other believers. See Romans 5:5.

- 2) Jesus' teaching on LOVING ONE ANOTHER isn't some high, mystical teaching that can only be understood by philosophers. It is a down to earth love that we are to live out in everyday life in relationships with other believers. Here are two practical questions:
 - a) Question #1: WHO are the "one another" Jesus calls us to love, that He wants to love through us? Answer: Jesus' brethren – all those HE calls His family – and therefore, are now our brothers and sisters.
 - i) Those who are nearest to us – that's where we start – right in the home – Christian husbands and wives loving one another, Christian parents loving their children.
 - ii) Those who least deserve our love – those who may have sinned against us. Compare: How great is Jesus' love for us – that He came to us to rescue us from the wrath of God when we were totally covered with the filth and ugliness of our sins.

 - b) Question #2: HOW are we to love one another? Answer: Just as Jesus has loved us!
 - i) By forgiving our Christian brothers & sisters when they sin against us – even if they don't come to us to ask us for forgiveness. Illustration: Our experience in our church in Sydney.
 - ii) By making sacrifices for one another in order to help and save a brother. See John 15:12-14 – sacrificing something precious in order to help them in a time of need; by laying down our lives for the brethren.
 - iii) By deeds of love, not just words. See 1 John 3:16-18 – "talk is cheap" but if we love as Jesus loved, it will mean putting aside our feelings that sometimes create a barrier in our spirit to loving a brother in truth, and then doing a loving deed appropriate to the person and guided by the Spirit. N.B. "Five languages of love".

Conclusion

- 1) After Jesus gave this new commandment to His early disciples, He told them what would happen as they obeyed this command: *"the world will know that you are*

My disciples if you have love one to another.” See John 13:35. Illustration: Tertullian was a great Christian writer and leader from Nth. Africa in the 2nd century. Just before his time, there had been a mass turning to Christ in Nth. Africa. In his writings he explains why so many people had been attracted to the Christian faith – from their pagan clubs and taverns. Because they had witnessed the unusual love that Christians had for one another – their “community” was so strikingly different to their hate-dominated clubs and societies.

- 2) As we listen to and heed Jesus’ command for us believers today, we can expect that the world outside will see and will be attracted to Christ by the power of His love flowing through us. This is God’s will and His way to draw many to listen to the Gospel message.
- 3) However, let us not be discouraged because we have failed to obey Jesus’ commandment in the past.
 - a) Rather let us confess our LOVELESSNESS as “sin” and receive His forgiving love.
 - b) Then let us give ourselves to be CHANNELS of Jesus’ love – today, this week – among one another – overflowing with true love for others.